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ABSTRACT

A number of resources are available to teachers planning a student visit to a French Canadian area such as Quebec. A primary one, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education offers a wide range of information on French Canadian language and culture, including instructional modules designed for use in English-language classes in Canada. These modules cover topics such as: French as spoken in Canada, focusing on phonological variations from standard spoken French; interviews with French Canadian teenagers about school, families, and their goals in life; Canadian history and national and provincial politics, including current issues such as separatism; and French-Canadian popular and folk singers. Other materials of interest to teachers include teacher-oriented listening and reading materials on Canadian French; works by French-Canadian authors; and guides to the arts in French Canada. Summer programs for American teachers and professional association opportunities for teacher experiences abroad are also available. (MSE)

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QUEBEC: PREPARING FOR AN EDUCATIONAL VISIT

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Travel is by its very nature educational. As foreign language teachers we would agree that visitng a country where the target language is spoken is the best way to learn about the culture and improve language skills. My own experience tells me that the more one knows about the foreign language and culture before arriving in the country, the more one benefits from the visit, especially in the case of a brief sojourn. In addition, preparing for the visit is half the fun, because our incentive to learn is all the more intense as we anticipate the experience of really being there. The following ideas, then, are presented to help teachers prepare themselves and their students for a trip to French-speaking Canada.

Textbooks at both the high school and college levels proudly point out the fact that there is a unique Francophone culture located on our northern border within a day's drive from Ohio and from the northeastern part of the United States. But most textbooks devote only a chapter or two to French Canadian culture and give no details about the distinctive aspects of the language. My point here is not to criticize textbooks. They do a good job presenting grammar along with readings on Francophone cultures. The point is that, in order to prepare students for a trip to Quebec, it is necessary to look elsewhere for additional material. But where? This is the question I set out in earnest to answer several years ago.

After having spent two summers in Quebec, one studying linguistics at Laval University and another as a group leader for The Experiment in International Living, I had acquired an extensive bibliography on French-Canadian language and culture. There is certainly no lack of published research on these subjects. The problem was that the material I had collected was not at the appropriate level or in the right format to use with students learning French as a second langauge. For example, I wanted my students to hear conversations in Canadian French spoken by young people their own age. My only oral sample of Québecois was a recording from the Laval University archives that featured elderly people from rural areas recounting local folk tales. The recording was very difficult to understand and had no transcript. This type of material is interesting for researchers but would discourage and bore students in intermediate French classes. After a search of catalogs of American companies that produce audio programs turned up nothing on Canadian French, I contacted the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto. By chance, I discovered a gold mine of information. OISE had received grants to produce special materials on French-Canadian language and culture to be used in high schools and colleges in English-speaking Canada.

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The researchers at OISE began their project by consulting teachers to find out what type of materials would be suitable for use in their French classes. Teachers wanted materials that they could "plug in" to their on-going curriculum so that they could present units focusing on French Canada. The OISE staff came up with the idea of producing modules, which are kits of materials on different subjects, such as language, political leaders, singers, and the city of Quebec. Each OISE module contains a teachers' manual, thirty booklets, a cassette recording, and, in some cases, slides or other special activity materials. A great deal of research has gone into each module so that the teacher can present the unit with the materials provided in the kit, and so that students do not have to buy extra textbooks. The OISE modules along with additional readings from current sources provide excellent preparation for an educational visit to Quebec.

Language

An area often neglected when studying Francophone Canada is the language. Although Standard French provides the basis for understanding Canadian French, significant differences in lexicon and pronunciation are not usually presented to students learning French as a second language. Most French teachers have never been introduced to Canadian French as part of their own course work in college. The OISE module entitled Le français parlé au Canada (1) is very well conceived because it assumes that the teacher has had no previous training in Canadian French. The Resource Booklet included in the module explains such terms as standard language, dialect, regional variations, and register. It also gives a brief account of the origins of Canadian French along with examples of lexical differences and discusses attitudes towards the language. Written on a level that high school and college students can easily understand, the Resource Booklet provides a good introduction to the second part of the module, which gives an oral presentation of the most important phonological differences between Standard French and Canadian French.

Although there are phonetic variations throughout the different regions of French-speaking Canada, the researchers who prepared the OISE module focus on the basic phonological characteristics that distinguish Canadian French from the standard language spoken in France. A difference that one notices right away in Canadian French is the frequent occurrence of assibilation, a certain friction that accompanies the consonants /t/ and /d/ when they precede the high vowels /i/, /y/, and /u/. Standard French /mardi/, for example, is most often pronounced /mardzi/ in Canadian French. On the cassette included in the module Le français parlé au Canada, the narrator explains in English the basic phonetic differences and then gives contrasting examples in Standard French and Canadian French. Other phonological characteristics presented are the apico-dental /r/ often heard in Montreal, the use of /ɔ/ in Canadian French in place of the Standard French /a/

or /ɑ/ at the end of words; the use of /I/, /Y/, and /ʊ/ in Canadian French instead of /i/, /y/, and /u/; the differences in the nasal vowels; and the dipthongization found in Canadian French. Each explanation is followed by contrasting examples that allow students to hear the differences very clearly. After the explanation and examples are given, a listening quiz tests students' ability to discriminate between words pronounced in Standard French and Canadian French. Finally, a short anecdote is recounted in Canadian French so that students can hear a sample of continuous speech instead of just isolated words. Le français parlé au Canada is an excellent introduction to Canadian French and can be used at various levels. Although it is designed for students in intermediate classes, I found it to be very useful as a point of departure for the study of Canadian French in my advanced phonetics course.

The researchers at OISE produced two more modules focusing on langauge that can be used as a follow-up to Le Français parlé au Canada. Devant le micro and Devant le micro II present interviews with French Canadian teenagers who talk about school, their families, and their goals in life. These recordings provide an opportunity to hear the flow of speech and several different voices. Both teachers and students alike can improve their listening comprehension level with these modules, which include transcripts and notes on words having a particular meaning in Canadian French. After listening to the tapes several times on their own, my students were able to discuss in class additional examples of the phonological characteristics they had learned about in the module Le Français parlé au Canada. Their ability to listen actively was evident in the examples they presented in class. One student even went beyond the class assignment. From his short wave radio, he recorded a Montreal news broadcast announcing the death of Indira Gandhi. While playing the tape in class, the student pointed out that each time the announcer said the name Gandhi there was assibilation, i.e., /gãdzi/.

The OISE modules on Canadian French are the only audio materials I have been able to find that deal specifically with language. Both the content and format are well designed for students of French as a second language. Teachers and students who are planning to go to Quebec would benefit even more from their trip after having studied and listened to Canadian French before going. Students benefit by having acquired a higher level of comprehension and by approaching their visit with a more objective, inquisitive attitude towards the language. In other words, they will be able to deal with the language at a much higher level than that reflected in the trite comment one hears so often about Canadian French, "it sounds funny."

After completing the basic introduction to Canadian French described above, students are able to listen actively, and they have a keener sense of observation. To reinforce these skills,

have them take along a pocket-size notebook in which they take notes on words and phrases they see and hear during their tirp. This "language journal" encourages them to listen and read actively while in a French-speaking culture and provides the basis for a lively discussion after returning home. A more precise assignment could be given in the form of a language scavenger hunt. Have the students write down the French words from ten signs, two headlines in Le Devoir (an important Quebec newspaper), ten words from menus in French, words in which they hear examples of assibilation, diphthongization, nasal vowels that are different from Standard French, etc. This activity is not only fun, but it also emphasizes what students have learned and enccourages them to be more observant while visiting a French-speaking country.

The focus of the discussion up to this point has been on language materials that are appropriate for preparing students for a visit to Quebec. I would also like to mention briefly some publications that would be of particular interest to teachers. A fascinating book on language entitled Practical Handbook of Quebec and Acadian French (2) has just recently been published. Common French-Canadian words and expressions used by individuals, the mass media, and in literature are presented in categories along with their near equivalents in Standard French and English. Differences in grammar and pronunciation are also explained. The authors provide an interesting section on the language spoken by the Acadians of the Maritime Provinces and of Louisiana. The description of Acadian French is a very helpful introduction to the works of Acadian writer Antonine Maillet. One of her most challenging works from the point of view of language is La Sagouine (3), which is written in Acadian dialect. The novel is sold with a recording of excerpts from the text to give the reader an idea of how the language sounds. Additional readings on Canadian French can be found in The French Language and Culture in Canada (4) and in Speaking Canadian French (5).

Although reading about Canadian French gives us a better understanding of the language, hearing it spoken is essential in order to function well in French-speaking Canada. Live television broadcasts from Montreal and Quebec picked up by satellite dish have just recently been made available to faculty and students at Ohio University. A grant from the U. S. Department of Education provided funds for the dish as part of a program to teach French and Spanish to students in journalism and mass communications. The broadcasts provide hours of Canadian French in the form of interviews with people from many different parts of Francophone Canada, children's shows, and news programs. The Department of Modern Languages at Ohio University is now seeking funding for a Resources Center so that teachers from all over Ohio can borrow video tapes of French-Canadian broadcasts to use for educational purposes. Thus, the opportunities for hearing Canadian French will be greatly increased and will better prepare teachers and students for a visit to Quebec.

History and Politics

In order to appreciate the unique aspects of Quebec culture, students need to have some knowledge of the history and politics of French-speaking Canada. A great deal has been written on these subjects, but here again I would like to focus on materials that are especially appropriate for students in high school and college French classes. Recognizing the need for a better understanding of French-Canadian history and politics, the researchers at OISE produced two modules that present the history of French-English relations in Canada from two different points of view.

The OISE module entitled René Lévesque et le séparatisme presents a brief historical description of the settlement of French Canada and the major conflicts that have contributed to the development of separatist feelings in Quebec. Although the separatist movement has very little support in Quebec today (a recent poll indicates that 81% of Quebeckers are in favor of staying within the Confederation), the historical background provided in the module helps students understand the economic, political, social, and religious factors that led to the separatist position. The struggle to preserve the French-Canadian language and culture can be seen in the many conflicts with the larger Anglophone population of Canada. The writers of the module maintain a balance on the question of separatism by presenting eight contemporary attitudes towards confederation from the most radical viewpoint expressed by the revolutionary group, the FLQ (Front de Libération du Québec), to the most conservative position called "uninationalism and unilingualism." The historical and political background material is presented in both French and English in the module's Student Handbook so that all students in the class can prepare the same assignment and discuss it in either language, depending on the level of the class. Each section is followed by discussion questions and ideas for further research. A taped interview with René Lévesque gives a more personal view of the man who has inspired a surge of energy and vitality within the province of Quebec. For more than eight years Lévesque has served as Quebec's Prime Minister and has led the Parti Québecois, which recently voted two to one to delete sovereignty from the party platform in the next election. The module René Lévesque et le séparatisme provides teachers and students with the necessary background to understand important current developments in Quebec's government.

The relationship between the provincial governments and the Canadian Confederation is well presented in the OISE module Trudeau et le féderalisme. Trudeau contrasts his viewpoint with that of René Lévesque by emphasizing the inherent dangers of a new division of powers between the federal government and the provinces. Basic political vocabulary is clearly explained, such as féderalisme, confederation, les Péquistes, etc. Trudeau is considered to be an excellent speaker in both French and English. A cassette recording of his country-wide radio and television speech

of November 24, 1976, concerning the election of a separatist Parti Québecois government in Quebec is included in the module. Trudeau's ability to convince and move his listeners is evident in this speech in which he extols "une fraternité beaucoup plus large que celle du sang, une fraternité humaine fondée sur l'espérance, fondée sur la charité au sens biblique." Hearing Trudeau speak provides excellent comprehension practice in French for students. A transcript of the speech is provided that includes notes in English, explaining references that might not be understood by American teachers and students. The Trudeau module along with the one on René Lévesque offers a balanced view of Canadian politics at a level that students can understand. Additional notes, references, and bibliographies are included in each module providing direction for more advanced study of the subject (6).

As a follow-up to the study of Quebec history and politics, students could keep a journal during their visit in which they describe briefly the significance of the historical sites they visit, such as the Plains of Abraham. They could also buy copies of Quebec newspapers and look for articles on René Lévesque, the Parti Québecois, or on the new Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney (7). You could require that they find three articles on these subjects and write a summary of each when they return home. If you stay in a hotel that has television in each room, have the students listen to a news broadcast and report on the topics of the major events (8).

The Arts

During the past twenty-five years Quebec has experienced an artistic renaissance, especially in literature, music, theater, and cinema. Pride in their own culture has inspired a surge of creativity among writers and singers, some of whom have been acclaimed well beyond the borders of Quebec. In 1979, for example, Antonine Maillet won a coveted French literary award, the Prix Goncourt, for her work Pélagie-la-Charrette, which recounts the return of the exiled Acadians to their homeland. The awarding of the prize happened to coincide with the 375th anniversary of the founding of Acadia, the oldest French colony in North America. Most important, the Prix Goncourt recognized the talent of a French-Canadian writer for the first time.

Although Antonine Maillet's writing would be too difficult for intermediate-level students, teachers would enjoy reading her works along with those of other French-Canadian authors such as Gabrielle Roy, Michel Tremblay, and Jacques Godbout. Helpful articles can be found in the May 1980 issue of The French Review, which is devoted entirely to Quebec. A brief history of Quebec cinema, theater, novel, poetry, sculpture, and painting is presented in Découvrir le Québec: Un guide culturel (9). This guide provides an excellent, up-to-date (1984) introduction to the arts in Quebec and gives references for further reading.

Young people are enthusiastic about popular music, which is very much a part of our culture. They also enjoy spending money on cassettes and records. If you introduce them to Québecois singers in advance, they will be more likely to purchase tapes in French while visiting Quebec. The researchers at OISE recognized the importance of popular music for young people by producing three modules on French-Canadian singers. The background information on the artists and their music provides the materials with which to present popular music in an organized way.

The first of these OISE modules, Chansons et Chansonniers, features Robert Charlebois, Gilles Vigneault, Georges Dor, and Monique Leyrac. For each singer there is a biographical sketch, a description of the type of music he or she sings and a recording of a song made famous by the singer. The lyrics to the songs and notes are given, which is especially helpful to the teacher who would otherwise have much research to do to figure out unusual references. "La Manic," a song made popular by Georges Dor, for example, refers to the Manicouagan Dam built by Quebec engineers. The most popular Quebecois rock singer is Robert Charlebois, who recently had an enormous success at the Olympia in Paris. Two of his records, Les grands succès de Robert Charlebois and Québeclove (10), have been big sellers in Quebec and France.

The second OISE module on French-Canadian singers is Gilles Vigneault, devoted entirely to the poet, song writer, and singer whose name is the title of the kit. His poems and the words to his songs are studied as examples of Quebec lyricism. The materials in the module give students a more profound knowledge of Vigneault's music. The most recent module, Edith Butler, gives an excellent introduction to the music of the popular Acadian poet and singer. Two of her records are Avant d'être dépaysé and L'Acadie, L'Acadie (11). For students eager to spend their money on souvenirs, what better purchase than a tape or record of Quebec music that they can enjoy after returning home.

Conclusion

Within the limited scope of this presentation I hope that I have succeeded in giving you some concrete ideas on how to begin preparing for a visit to Quebec. The materials that I have suggested are not difficult to obtain; as indicated, the difficulty was finding out what educational materials on Quebec are available. Your interest in Quebec will no doubt lead you to additional sources. There are numerous summer programs in Quebec that welcome American teachers, and each year the American Association of Teachers of French selects the recipient of a scholarship for summer study offered by the Quebec government (12).

Whether you visit Quebec with your students or on your own, you will broaden your knowledge of Francophone cultures and become acquainted with the many unique aspects of Quebec.

Notes

1 A price list and descriptions of all OISE modules is available from OISE Press, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Canada M5S 1V6.

2 Sinclair Robinson and Donald Smith, Practical Handbook of Quebec and Acadian French (Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd. (35 Britain St., Toronto, Canada M5A 1R7), 1984.

3 Antoine Maillet, La Sagouine (Ottowa: Editions Lemeac, 1974).

4 René de Chantal, The French Language and Culture in Canada (Brandon, Manitoba: Brandon University Press, 1969).

5 Mark Ortin, Speaking Canadian French (Toronto: General Publishing Co., 1971).

6 Current information on Quebec can be obtained from the Gouvernement de Quebec, 35 East Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60601.

7 For a report on Prime Minister Brian Mulroney (born in Quebec province), see Time magazine, September 17, 1984. Since many Americans have only a vague idea of how the Canadian government works, Time provides extensive background information on the subject along with a detailed account of Mulroney's life and political career.

8 For further research on French-Canadian history and politics, consult the following works, among others: René Lévesque, An Option for Quebec (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968); Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Federalism and the French Canadians (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968); Jean Hamelin and Jean Provencher, Brève histoire du Québec (Montreal: Boreal Express, 1981); and Mason Wad, Les Canadiens français de 1760 à nos jours (Montreal: Cercle du livre de France, 1963).

9 A special publication of the Association québecoise des professeurs de francais, C. P. 9185, Quebec, Canada G1V 4B1. For up-to-date information on cultural events in Quebec, write to Quebec House, 35 East Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL 60601. Ask for their free publication Quebec Today.

10 Robert Charlebois, Les grands succes de Robert Charlebois, Gamma Records G2 1003, and Québeclove, Gamma Records, GS 136.

11 Gilles Vigneault, Avant d'etre dépaysé, Columbia Records, FS 96156, and L'Acadie, L'Acadie, Columbia Records, FS 90274.

12 For information on summer programs, write to Ministère de l'Education-information, Service d'accueil des étudiants étrangers, Edifice G, 17e étage, 1035, rue de la Chevrotière, Québec G1R 5A5.